



Pick Your Path to Health

Not Just Kids' Stuff: Adults Need Immunizations to Protect Themselves

Getting vaccines is something we remember from our childhood, but did you know that adults need vaccinations to stay healthy as well?

Vaccines, for adults and children, are recognized as one of the easiest and most economical ways to stay healthy. Unfortunately, the Latino population has low immunization rates.

Latina women, in particular, are not taking advantage of the benefits vaccines have to offer. For example, among adults who reported receiving the tetanus vaccine during the previous 10 years, women were less likely than men to report having received it. Among adults aged 65 and older, Hispanics were one of two ethnic groups reported as being least likely to have received the tetanus vaccine.

The low level of vaccination for tetanus in Latina women is worrisome. The tetanus and Hepatitis A vaccines are highly recommended for Latina women who work in the housekeeping and restaurant sectors and are exposed to accidents and cuts when working in kitchens.

When it comes to health, "Hispanic women have great faith in God's will," explains Maria Gomez-Murphy of The Way of the Heart: The Promotora Institute in Nogales, Arizona and Mexico. When a woman finds she has developed a disease, she often believes, "God would have it be so."

However, preventing illnesses from happening in the first place is important. Vaccines can help protect you from a variety of illnesses such as pneumonia and influenza (known as the flu), both the sixth leading cause of death in the Latino community.

The importance of vaccines for adults is not exaggerated. Around 70,000 people die each year from diseases that could have been prevented by vaccines, and adults remain 100 times more likely than children to die from preventable diseases.

If you suffer from a serious illness, vaccines can actually help save your life. People with diabetes are about three times more likely to die from the flu or from pneumonia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC). The CDC reports that half the people with diabetes did not get a flu shot in recent years. This is important information since diabetes is the fourth leading cause of death in Latina women and the fifth leading cause of death among all Latinos.

Do You Know How to Protect Yourself?

Many adults don't know that they need to protect themselves against many of the same diseases as their children. You should talk with your health care provider about the vaccines you need. Here's some information on several vaccines to get you started.

Influenza (also known as the flu): This vaccine is recommended every fall for anyone over 50, for people of all ages who have chronic diseases, and for anyone who wants to reduce the risk of catching the flu. In 1997-98, only 51 percent of the Latino population aged 65 and older received the flu vaccine.

Pneumococcal pneumonia: This vaccine is recommended at age 65 or to anyone younger than 65 with a chronic illness. If you have a chronic disease, such as diabetes, you are three times more likely to die from pneumonia. Few women aged 65 and over have ever received this vaccine and only 19 percent of Latina women have ever received it.

Tetanus & Diphtheria: Three tetanus and diphtheria shots are recommend along with a booster shot every 10 years.

Measles, Mumps, Rubella: One dose is recommended for those born after 1957 who have not been vaccinated. It is also highly recommended for women of childbearing age.

Chickenpox: The vaccine is recommended if you haven't had Chickenpox, which is often more severe in adults.

Hepatitis B: Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease. Those in certain risk groups should consider immunization, including: health care workers likely to have blood or needle-stick exposures; men who have sex with men; people who have more than one sex partner in six months; people with sexually transmitted diseases; and users of injectable street drugs. One in 20 people in the U.S. will get hepatitis B some time during his or her life.

Hepatitis A: This vaccine is recommended in two doses for all adults, especially for people who work in kitchens and restaurants and people who travel to countries that exhibit a high risk of infection.

Steps to Better Health

It is sometimes confusing to know what vaccines we should get and when. If you aren't sure what shots are right for you, be sure to ask your local health clinic. The important thing is that you become an informed health care consumer. If your health care worker doesn't bring it up, be sure to ask about which vaccines you need.

- Find an immunization program and information about vaccines by calling the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Immunization Information Hotline at 1-800-232-2522 (English) or 1-800-232-0233 (Spanish).
- Keep an immunization record.
- Keep your eyes open for vaccines that are offered at your local grocery store, pharmacy, or church. These nontraditional settings are often more convenient and economical.
- The Immunization Action Coalition provides a variety of information in Spanish and English online at <http://www.immunize.org>

Let immunization help you avoid serious illnesses and keep you on a path to better health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."